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Letter dated 14 January 2016 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to present the main findings and recommendations of the strategic review of the Office of my Special Envoy for the Sahel, which was completed by the Department of Political Affairs of the Secretariat in December 2015.

The strategic review was conducted from October to December 2015 in New York and in the region (Dakar, Nouakchott and Bamako) to assess progress and analyse current challenges to and opportunities in facilitating the implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel. The review team was, in particular, tasked with determining whether adjustments were required to the objectives and institutional design of the Office, including making recommendations on the location of its headquarters, as requested by the Security Council (see S/PRST/2015/24).

The review was undertaken in consultation with all relevant United Nations entities and included consultations with some members of the Security Council and representatives of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and the Niger, as well as other regional and international stakeholders.

In the review it was found that the Office had made good progress in carrying forward a complex, pioneering and hybrid mandate combining both political and programmatic responsibilities. It was highlighted that the innovative nature of the approach adopted by the Office and the agility and creativity with which it had been implemented, in the absence of any frame of reference, should be recognized as a significant contribution to the expansion of the international toolbox for conflict prevention.

In terms of specific findings, the review team reported that, in support of the implementation of the integrated strategy, my Special Envoy had provided continuous support and leadership to the coordination structures established to ensure coherence in the implementation of the integrated strategy, including by convening coordination mechanisms, engaging with country-level strategic planning processes and articulating strategic priorities in consultation with regional actors.

The review team found that the activities had resulted in the development of several joint regional projects, the alignment of country-specific planning documents with the integrated strategy and progress towards the establishment of a United Nations trust fund for the Sahel. At the subregional level, the review team noted the efforts of the Office to strengthen relations with regional actors, mobilize

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partnerships and promote local ownership of the integrated strategy, including through good offices and facilitation of cooperation, as well as institutional support to the Group of Five for the Sahel and its activities. The Office had also undertaken regular activities to support enhanced coordination among international and regional partners, including through participation in and support to the Ministerial Coordination Platform for the Sahel and the informal contact group of international partners.

While noting the request by the Security Council for recommendations on the location of the Office (see S/PRST/2015/24), and the request of the Heads of State of the Group of Five for the Sahel for the reinforcement and transfer of the Office to the Group's headquarters, made at the summit of the Group of 20 November 2015, the review team discussed the advantages and disadvantages of relocating the Office to Nouakchott. In the light of the operational challenges relating to a relocation of the Office, the team noted that the deployment of a light liaison cell to Nouakchott could be a constructive alternative.

With regard to the institutional design of the Office of my Special Envoy for the Sahel, three possible options going forward were discussed in the review:

(a) Maintain the Office in Dakar as a stand-alone entity, with a liaison cell in Nouakchott;

(b) Relocate the Office to Nouakchott as a stand-alone entity;

(c) Merge the Office into the United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA), which would be renamed the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS). Under a merger, the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Sahel would be renamed the United Nations Office for the Sahel and headed by the current Assistant Secretary-General, who would report through my Special Representative for West Africa and Head of UNOWA. Existing levels of staffing and resources would be maintained. It was noted in the review that a merger could take place in two modes: a light merger, whereby existing capacity to support the integrated strategy would remain largely unchanged, except for its reporting line through my Special Representative for West Africa and Head of UNOWA; and a heavy merger, whereby the head of the Office of my Special Envoy at the level of Assistant Secretary-General would also assume the role of my deputy special representative for West Africa, with responsibilities for the entire regional office and its mandate.

While noting that each option involved political and operational trade-offs, the review team concluded that a light merger could provide an optimal configuration to support the implementation of the integrated strategy, notably by ensuring dedicated senior-level attention, high levels of political access, sufficient technical capability and efficiency in the use of resources. It would also signal the continued political commitment of the United Nations to the Sahel, in response to the request of the Member States of the region.

With regard to the mandate, the review team underscored the need to provide authoritative guidance on the geographical focus of the Office of my Special Envoy or its successor entity, in particular on the calibration of engagement between the five core countries and the wider Sahel region. In addition, it was suggested in the review that the revised terms of reference of the Office or its successor entity should clarify the extent of its programmatic and fundraising role.

On the basis of the strategic review, I intend to proceed with the implementation of its recommendations, including initiating a light merger of the Office of my Special Envoy for the Sahel and UNOWA and making the necessary adjustments to the guidance on the implementation of the integrated strategy.

I should be grateful if you would bring the present letter to the attention of the members of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) **BAN** Ki-moon